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No. 408

The
BROWN MOUSE

A RURAL PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

By
MABEL B. STEVENSON

Based on the Novel of the same name by
HERBERT QUICK

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NEW YORK
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(The Above Are Subject to Royalty When Produced)

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SUGGESTIONS FOR CANADIAN PRODUCTION

According to Herbert Quick's novel, "The Brown Mouse," on which the play is based, Colonel Woodruff's daughter Jennie has been elected County Superintendent of Schools, and in her official capacity has to consider the complaints of the trustees regarding the way in which Jim Irwin is conducting his school. In Canada, however, the County Superintendent is known as an "Inspector." Inspectors in Canada are not elected, and as a usual thing the office is not held by a woman. In order to adapt the play for use in Canada, therefore, the following changes should be made in the text:

Substitute the word "section" for "district" throughout the play.

Substitute the word "inspector" for "superintendent" throughout the play.

Substitute the name of any well-known agricultural college in Canada for "Ames."

Page 9. Omit Jim's speech beginning "I came in just now—," and Jennie's speech down to "winning promotion."

Page 19. Omit last sentence of Colonel W.'s speech, "They will probably ask you as Superintendent . . . action."

Page 20. Omit last part of Jennie's speech "not in my official capacity, but as an old friend."

Page 32. Change Jennie's speech, "They are going to petition me as Superintendent" to "They are going to petition the Inspector"; and "my decision" to "the Inspector's decision."

Page 34. Change Colonel W.'s speech, "ask Jennie, as superintendent, to come" to "ask the Inspector to come."

Page 36. In this scene have the Inspector take Jennie's part—and have Jennie as a spectator.

Page 41. Change Jennie's speech, "Proceedings before me," to "Proceedings before the Inspector"; and her speech, "I found," etc., to "The Inspector found."

Page 43. In Bonner's speech change "Republican" and "Democrat" to "Grit" and "Tory."

CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance.

JENNIE WOODRUFF, *Colonel Woodruff's daughter.*

JIM IRWIN, *the Brown Mouse.*

COLONEL WOODRUFF, *a prosperous farmer.*

EZRA BRONSON

CORNELIUS BONNER

HAAKON PETERSON

RAYMOND SIMMS

NEWT. BRONSON

} *Trustees of the Woodruff
school district.*

} *Two schoolboys.*

MRS. EZRA BRONSON.

MRS. CORNELIUS BONNER.

MRS. HAAKON PETERSON.

PROFESSOR WITHERS.

FANNY BRONSON.

THE DOCTOR.

MR. SIMMS.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR PERFORMERS

JIM IRWIN: *Should be dressed in rough, plain clothes during the first part of the play and should move with some awkwardness. As the play progresses he should show a gain in ease of manner and in self-confidence, and on his return from Ames should show a quiet sense of having made good. In Acts III and IV his dress may show signs of improvement, such, for instance, as in wearing a more up-to-date collar and tie; but he should not, at any time, appear as a dude. In his speech at the school meeting in Act I, and in his final speech at the school meeting in Act IV, he must speak with all the enthusiasm and force of an eager idealist who is pleading for better things.*

COLONEL WOODRUFF: *A prosperous farmer, who in early life had served in the army. He is influential in the community by reason of his force of character. He is, in his own mind, conservative by nature, but in reality he is progressive and is one of the first to support the new idea of better rural schools. Dressed as a well-to-do farmer.*

JENNIE WOODRUFF: *Any suitable costume for wear in her home, with something different for wear at the school meeting, and a street suit for her appearance on her return from Ames.*

EZRA BRONSON: *A middle-aged man. His costume should be that of a partly dressed-up farmer; i.e., he may wear a tweed or a serge suit, but should not be in white linen collars or cuffs such as COL. WOODRUFF might wear. In Act I, Scene III, he should show a fairly good-humored toleration of JIM'S speech, but should show no real interest in it. In Act II, Scene II, he need not show the vehemence of BONNER, but rather a milder manner of protest. His son has been kept at school by JIM'S methods, and MR. BRONSON should not show his opposition as strongly as BONNER.*

CORNELIUS BONNER: *Should talk with Irish accent and be a more fiery type of man than BRONSON. Should show persistent opposition to JIM IRWIN throughout the play until the last Act, when his speech should show that he is as enthusiastic for JIM as he was against him previously. He has then made up his mind to make JIM'S popularity a political asset for himself in county politics.*

HAAKON PETERSON: *A mild-spoken, soft-voiced Scandinavian who has learned English, but who still pronounces his initial "j" as if it were "y." He at no time expresses his opposition to JIM IRWIN with any vehemence. He opposes him out of a sense of loyalty to the school board.*

MRS. BRONSON: *A good motherly woman, noted for her housekeeping. As the play progresses, she shows that she is pleased that her boy has become a better boy under JIM'S teaching and that she would like to come out as one of JIM'S supporters but for her previous attitude of criticism.*

MRS. BONNER: *The most voluble of the three women. Shows censorious spirit. Acts as real*

commander of the fault-finding visit to the school.

MRS. PETERSON: *Slow-spoken and dignified. A farm woman who prizes refinement, but who thinks that the finer things of life can be found only in town. Her gentle but firm character is a strong contrast to MRS. BONNER'S spitefulness. Accent like her husband's.*

NEWT. BRONSON and RAYMOND SIMMS: *Where they appear together in the play the schoolboys should furnish amusement, but they must be careful not to allow their performance to divert the attention of the audience from the more serious action.*

PROF. WITHERS and THE DOCTOR: *If there is difficulty in securing performers for all the parts, these two characters may be played by the same person by using different make-up.*

FANNY BRONSON: *This part should be played by a little girl who will look smaller and younger than NEWT. BRONSON.*

STAGE-SETTING

ACT I. SCENE I

Sitting room in COLONEL WOODRUFF'S house. Use chairs, table, and such fittings as will give the effect of a comfortable but not elaborate sitting-room, such as might be found in any prosperous farm home. Use articles of furniture such as can be easily removed, in order to change to the following scene.

SCENE II

A Bare Room.

If this can, conveniently, be made to give the effect of a bare schoolroom, so much the better. A map may be hung on the wall, a teacher's

desk and two or three school desks, arranged to give the schoolroom effect. But these are not necessary. A table without a cloth and a few chairs would suffice. If schoolroom effect is produced, use an empty chalk box for the ballots; otherwise, a hat.

SCENE III

Same as Scene I

ACT II. SCENES I, II and III

The Schoolroom.

Blackboard with following problem in Arithmetic and following spelling list:

"If in each 250 grains of wheat in Mr. Bronson's bins, 30 are cracked, dead, or otherwise not capable of sprouting, what per cent. of the seed sown will grow?"

"Fertilizer, Potash, Nitrogen, Kernel, Loam, Moisture."

Market reports pinned to the wall. A rack of agricultural bulletins. Farm papers piled about. Have copies of whatever farm papers are best known in your locality. If possible, have a typewriter, a sewing machine and a Babcock milk tester in evidence. Use every means available to indicate that this is very different from the average schoolroom. This setting remains unchanged throughout the Act, except that in the final scene a poster plainly lettered, "Welcome to Woodruff School Fair," is prominently placed and women's wraps and baskets are about, indicating progress of fair out of doors.

ACT III. SCENE I.

Sitting-room in the home of MR. BRONSON.

For this, make such changes in the setting for

COL. WOODRUFF'S *sitting-room* as will indicate a slightly different type of farm home. This may be a combined kitchen and living-room. A line with socks and other garments pinned to it may be stretched across one corner. Have a shabby old lounge placed well toward the centre so that NEWT.'S speeches from the lounge may be heard by the audience.

SCENE II.

*Sitting-room in the home of COL. WOODRUFF.
Same as in Act I.*

ACT IV.

Schoolroom as in Act II.

It will not be necessary to bring back all the equipment shown in Act II. The teacher's desk, children's desks, blackboard and maps will be sufficient to indicate a schoolroom if too much time would be required to reset the stage as before.

THE BROWN MOUSE

ACT I

SCENE I

Sitting-room of COL. WOODRUFF'S farmhouse.

JENNIE WOODRUFF—*busied with needlework or arrangement of flowers.*

(Enter JIM IRWIN, wearing dirty overalls and muddy shoes, awkward in appearance and manner.)

JENNIE. Hello, Jim! What have you been busy at?

JIM. Oh, I've been feeding the soil—putting on manure. I didn't get it done yesterday on account of the roadwork. I came in just now to congratulate you upon your new position. Miss Woodruff, County Superintendent of Schools. *(Bows deeply)*

JENNIE. Thanks, Jim. I am glad I've got the position. I worked hard for it. It will be ever so much easier than teaching. And I like to feel that I am getting on—winning promotion.

(A few moments of silence.)

JENNIE. Look here, Jim. Don't you think you

should be at least preparing to be something better than a hired man?

JIM. What can I do? I'm tied hand and foot. I might have. . . .

JENNIE. You might have, but, Jim, you haven't . . . and I don't see any prospects. . . .

JIM. I've been writing for the farm papers, but—

JENNIE. But that doesn't get you anywhere, you know. You're a great deal more able and intelligent than Ed Smith, and see what a fine position he has in Chicago.

JIM. There's Mother, you know.

JENNIE. You can't do anything here. You've been a hired man for fifteen years . . . and you always will be unless you pull yourself loose. Even a girl can make a place for herself if she leaves the farm and doesn't marry. You're twenty-eight years old.

JIM. It's all wrong! The farm ought to be the place for the best sort of career—I love the soil! Mother and I can live on my wages—and the garden and chickens and the cow. After I received my teacher's certificate, I tried to work out some way of doing the same thing on a country teacher's wages. I couldn't. It doesn't seem right.

JENNIE. Well, whether it's right or not, it's so. You can't do anything as long as you stay on the farm.

JIM. But it ought to be possible for a man to do work on the farm, or in the rural schools, that would make him a living. If he is only a teacher in a country school, it ought to be possible for him to save money and buy a farm.

JENNIE. Dad's land is worth two hundred dollars an acre. A teacher would be a long time saving up money to buy a farm like his.

JIM. No, it can't be done. But there ought to

be such conditions that a teacher could make a living.

JENNIE. They do, if they can live at home during vacations. I do.

JIM. But a man teaching in the country ought to be able to marry.

JENNIE. Marry!

JIM. Yes. A country teacher ought to be able to marry.

JENNIE. Marry! A country teacher marry! *You marry! (Laughs) You marry! Humph!*

JIM. *(Stares a moment in surprise)* Oh! Good-day! *(Turns away—shows he is insulted)*

JENNIE. *(Very coolly)* Good-day.

(JIM goes out. JENNIE looks after him a moment in disgust, then resumes her work. Enter COL. WOODRUFF. Looks for a book or paper, or busies himself in some way for a few moments before speaking.)

COL. W.: I thought I saw Jim going down the lane, Jennie. Was he here?

JENNIE. Yes, father.

COL. W. Did he say whether he really intends to go to the school board meeting to-night?

JENNIE. No, he didn't mention it. Why, what would he go to the meeting for?

COL. W.: Oh! You know the deadlock is still on about engaging a new teacher. Bronson says he will have Mary Foster again or he'll give the school a darned long holiday. Bonner won't vote for anyone but Maggie Gilmartin—and Peterson says he'll stick to Herman Paulson until the Niagara Falls freeze over. It seems that yesterday, when the men were at the roadwork, they began jollyng Jim, telling him he was the man to break the dead-

lock. Jim retorted that he'd like to tell the whole board what he thought of them as public servants. "All right," said Bonner. "Come to the meeting tomorrow night and tell us. We've lacked brains on the board, that's clear. They ain't a man on the board that iver studied algebra. Come down to the meetin' and we'll have a hired man address the school board—an' begosh! I'll move we hire you as teacher!" Jim got kind of red, but told them he'd go down and tell them a few things.

JENNIE. How silly of him! He's better educated and smarter than any of them—but what good will it do for him to go to the meeting? They'll only make fun of him!

COL. W. I'm not so sure of that. He surprised some of them yesterday by knocking a strange man down!

JENNIE. Knocked a man down! Never!

COL. W. Yes. It was all over Newt. Bronson. The little, undersized harum-scarum! Always up to tricks! Well, he was working at the grading on the road, with the men, yesterday. Towards noon an auto came along. Newt. planted himself on some loose earth that was lying in the middle of the road, and waved to the driver to stop. The driver had got up speed so as to go over the pile, but he stopped and asked Newt. what he wanted. "Oh," says Newt., "I just wanted to ask you the correct time." The stranger jumped out of the car and was just going to strike the boy, when Jim caught his fist. "You're too angry to punish that boy just now," says Jim. But the driver turned on Jim and struck at him. Jim swung back with a blow that sent the man toppling over the pile of earth. He got up, picked up his goggles, and climbed into the car. Jim seemed ashamed of having hit a man.

But he always seems to like that boy Newt. and to stand up for him.

JENNIE. I don't see how he can. The boy is going to the bad. He swears like a trooper, and is soaked with tobacco.

COL. W. Jim always seems to find something to talk to him about. I heard him telling Newt. the other day all about nitrates in the soil, and showing him clover roots with the white specks on, and the boy seemed quite interested.

JENNIE. Oh, agriculture! Jim's always reading up about agriculture, but I don't see what good it does him. It's nothing but agriculture, agriculture, agriculture! I'm sick and tired of it! (*Gets up and makes her way toward the door during this speech*)

Curtain

SCENE II

A bare room with a table and some chairs. The three school trustees, JIM IRWIN, and a few spectators, including NEWT. BRONSON and RAYMOND SIMMS, present. BRONSON presiding over the meeting.

BRONSON. Is there any further discussion?

BONNER. (*Rising and addressing the Chair*) Mr. Chairman, we have wid us to-night a young man who nades no introduction to an audience in this place, Mr. Jim Irwin. He thinks we're bullheaded mules, and that all the schools are bad. At the proper time I shall move that we hire him for teacher; and pinding that motion, I move that he be given the floor. Ye've all heard of Mr. Irwin's ability as a white hope, and I know he'll be listened to wid respect.

JIM. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the Board, I'm not going to tell you anything that you don't know about yourselves. You are simply making a farce of the matter of hiring a teacher for this school. It is not as if any of you had a theory that the teaching methods of one of these teachers would be any better than those of the others. You know, and I know, that whichever is finally engaged, or even if your silly deadlock is broken by employing a new teacher, the school will be the same old story. It will still be the school it was when I came into it, a little ragged boy. In all the

years I attended this school I never did a bit of work in school which was economically useful. No other pupil ever did any real work of the sort farmers' boys and girls should do. We copied city schools and the schools we copied were poor schools. We made bad copies of them, too. If any of you three men were making a fight for a new kind of rural school, I'd say fight. But you aren't. You're just making individual fights for your favorite teachers. You will want to know what I mean by a new kind of rural school. By that I mean a school in which the work will be connected with the life of the farm homes of the children. I want the school to take into account the interests of country children. I want the children to have arithmetic problems based on such home interests as records of laying hens and the prices of cream and butter. I want them to have spelling lessons on words that grow out of other studies, not on lists of isolated, meaningless words. I want the boys given manual training, and taught soil management and seed testing, dairying, corn growing. I'd have the children measure things and weigh things and apply what they learn. I'd connect up the school with life in every possible way. And the children would get culture out of my kind of school—true culture. Around the kind of school I want would grow up a social life that would make the school the social as well as the educational centre of the countryside. But I'd keep you here all night if I were to try to picture to you fully the kind of country school I want. I'm not asking you to appoint me as teacher—but if I were teacher here, that's the kind of school I'd want to keep.

(JIM sits down, embarrassed. Faint applause from audience, chiefly from NEWT. and RAYMOND.)

BONNER. We have had the privilege of list'nin' to a great spache, Mr. Chairman. We should be proud to have a borned orator like this in the agricultural pop'lotion of the district. A reg'lar William Jen-nin's Bryan. (*Striking the table*) I don't understand what he was trying to tell us, but sometimes I've had the same difficulty with the spaches of other orators. Makin' a good spache is one thing and teaching a good school is another. I ought to know, for my missus was a school-teacher. But in order to bring this matter before the board, I nominate Mr. James E. Irwin, the Boy Orator of the Woodruff District, and the new white hope, f'r the job of teacher of this school, and I move that if he receives a majority of the votes of this board, the secretary and prisident be instructed to enter into a contract wid him f'r the comin' year.

CHAIRMAN. If there's no objection it will be so ordered. The Chair hears no objection—and it is so ordered. Prepare the ballots for a vote on the election of teacher, Mr. Secretary. Each votes his preference for teacher. A majority elects.

(Members of the board vote, place ballots in hat. Boys peek over BONNER's shoulder to see how he marks his ballot. At first the trustees appear quite indifferent. PETERSON unrolls the ballots and reads them with difficulty by the light of the coal-oil lamp. As he reads the second ballot he shows surprise; and when it is announced, BRONSON, who has been tilted back in his chair, takes his feet off the table and straightens up in evident surprise.)

SECRETARY (PETERSON). (*Draws out first ballot*)
James E. Irwin—one. (*Draws out second ballot*)

James E. Irwin, two. (*Draws out third ballot*)
James E. Irwin, three.

CHAIRMAN. (*Choking and stammering*) The ballot having shown the unanimous election of James E. Irwin, I declare him elected.

(*The Trustees look at one another in consternation, and act as if they do not know what to do next.*)

PETERSON. (*Suddenly*) I move we adjourn.

CHAIRMAN. If there's no objection, it's so ordered.

(*JIM and the spectators go out.*)

BONNER. What the divil—what for did you vote for that dub, Ez?

BRONSON. I voted for him because he fought for my boy yesterday. I didn't want it stuck into him too hard. I wanted him to have *one* vote.

BONNER. An' I wanted him to have *wan* vote, too. I thought meself the only dang fool on the board, an' he made a spache that airned wan vote—but for the love of hivin', that dub f'r a teacher! What came over you, Haak? You voted for him, too!

PETERSON. Ay wanted him to haf von vote, too! (*Strikes a match and lights his pipe as the curtain falls*)

Curtain

SCENE III

(Room as in Scene I. JENNIE seated by table, occupied with some work.)

(Enter COLONEL. Hunts for his slippers, seats himself heavily as if very stiff and tired, and begins to take off his shoes. In the course of the conversation he gets up, gets the newspaper and prepares to read.)

COL. W. Jennie, Jim Irwin was the best farm hand I ever had, and I'm sorry I've lost him.

JENNIE. I'm glad he's left you. He ought to be something better than a hired man.

COL. W. I've no idea he can make good as a teacher—and what is there in it if he does?

JENNIE. What has he lost if he doesn't? And why can't he make good?

COL. W. The school board's against him, for one thing. They'll fire him if they get a chance. I was talking to two of the trustees, Bronson and Bonner, to-day. They visited the school the other day. Bonner says Jim will never do. Says he had the children working at corn that day. They had all brought seed-corn, and were having a sort of corn show. The little chaps were learning to count by counting kernels and ears of corn and the Third Class was calculating percentage problems in arithmetic by making up what percentage of the ears were first-class. Bonner says it was the noisiest

school he ever saw. Bronson says: "My boy Newt. is as tickled as a colt and says he is going regular this winter." "Huh," says Bonner. "That's because Jim lets Newt. do as he darn pleases." "Well," says Bronson, "it's the first time he's ever pleased to do anything but deviltry." Both Bonner and Bronson admit that the attendance is larger than it ever was, and that the children can't be kept home, they're so crazy to go.

JENNIE. Yes, the attendance is larger. Even the children from that Simms family are attending regularly now, and they always hated school before. What sort of people are they?

COL. W. They're a shiftless family. Don't know much about farming. And the soil is so poor on that farm they are on that they'd need to know a good deal about farming to make anything out of it. But Jim's doing everything he can to help them. He has the two boys, young Newt. and Raymond Simms, out at the barn now picking out specimens of different grain seeds for their class to-morrow.

JENNIE. But, Father, how did Jim get Raymond Simms to come to school? He's very shy and backward, isn't he?

COL. W. Oh, he has visited the family and has got on good terms with old man Simms. For that matter, he has visited every family in the neighborhood. He has a notebook with all sorts of facts about every family in the section—how many acres each has, what kind of farming they are doing—livestock, grain, or mixed—whether they have a mortgage, whether the children are wayward, how far they are on in school, what they like to read, what they like to play. But the trustees don't like it. They want to fire Jim because he is not using the regular textbooks. They will probably ask you, as superintendent, to take some action.

JENNIE. Well, why doesn't Jim do as other teachers do? I met Haakon Peterson to-day. He was talking about Jim, too, and says some one ought to "line him up," as he calls it. "The way Jim is doing in the school is all wrong." He says: "Some one must line him up and make him do right. If some one does not line him up, he will have his certificate taken away." (*Pauses, resumes her work: gets up, and speaks rather hesitatingly*) Father, do you think I might speak to Jim and see if I can talk him out of some of his foolishness?—not in my official capacity, but as an old friend.

COL. W. (*Looks surprised, winks towards the audience*) Line him up, eh? Well, that's a good plan, and besides, you may get some good ideas out of Jim. (*Makes his way towards the door*)

JENNIE. Not likely.

COL. W. I don't know about that. I begin to think that Jim's a Brown Mouse.

JENNIE. A Brown Mouse? Whatever do you mean, father?

COL. W. (*Turns and faces the audience, and speaks half jokingly. This speech must be spoken very distinctly and with some deliberation, so that the meaning of the Brown Mouse may be made clear to the audience*) A fellow in Edinburgh crossed the Japanese waltzing mouse with the common white mouse. Every once in a while he got from his waltzing and white cross a brown mouse—not a common house mouse—but a wild mouse different from any he had ever seen. It ran away—it bit and gnawed—and raised hob. It was what we breeders call a Mendelian segregation of factors that had been in the waltzers and the white mice all the time. Now, Jim's father was a peddler—a sort of waltzing mouse, no good except to jump from one spot to another for no good reason. Jim's

mother is a white mouse of a woman—all the color washed out in one way or another. Jim may turn out to be a brown mouse, and if he does, he may be a bigger man than any of us. Anyhow, I'm for him!

JENNIE. He'll have to be a big man to make anything out of the job of a country school-teacher. If he'd only go to the city——

COL. W. (*Pauses as he is going out of the room, and speaks emphatically*) Any job's as big as the man who holds it down.

(JENNIE sits down and resumes her work, but throws it down as if unable to keep her mind on it. Knock at the door. Enter JIM. He is dressed in coarse, ill-fitting clothes and seems doubtful at first as to how JENNIE will receive him. But she speaks cordially.)

JENNIE. Hello, Jim! You're just the person I was wishing to see. Sit down. It's nice to see one's old friends.

JIM. (*Brightens up*) Yes, we are old friends, aren't we, Jennie?

JENNIE. Yes, we are, Jim. But everything is different now and getting more different all the time. Your new work, you know—I've been wanting to speak to you about that. Don't you think it would be better just to teach like other teachers do?

(JIM draws his chair close to JENNIE and takes her hand—points out a tiny scar.)

JIM. Do you remember how you got that scar?

JENNIE. Why, I don't believe I do.

JIM. I do. We—you and I and Mary Forsythe

—were playing mumble-peg, and you put your hand on the grass just as I threw the knife. It cut you and left that scar.

JENNIE. I remember now! How such things come back to one. And did it leave a scar when I pushed you toward the red-hot stove in the school-house one blizzardy day? The skin peeled off your wrist where it struck the stove.

JIM. Look at it! Right there!

JENNIE. Jim, do you know what I wish? I wish you wouldn't try to follow your own fads and fancies in your teaching. I'm afraid——

JIM. (*Who has been looking absent-minded, speaks dreamily*) And do you remember the day I carried you across the slew when it had been flooded by a big rain, and you couldn't get home from school?

JENNIE. Yes, I remember, Jim. But about the way you are teaching——

JIM. And do you remember that time the tornado just missed the schoolhouse and frightened everybody in school nearly to death?

JENNIE. Everybody but you, Jim. You looked out of the window and told the teacher that the twister was going north of us, and would kill somebody else.

JIM. Did I?

JENNIE. Yes, and when the teacher asked us to kneel and thank God, you said, "Why should we thank God that somebody else is blowed away?" She was greatly shocked.

JIM. And do you remember? . . . (*Takes JENNIE'S hand*)

JENNIE. (*Pulling away her hand*) You can't find any more scars on it. Seriously, Jim, there isn't any use of your going on with your queer way

of teaching. I've taught a country school—and know——

JIM. Let me see how much your hand has changed since I stuck the knife in it. It's longer and slenderer and whiter, and even more beautiful than the child hand I cut; but it was then the most beautiful in the world to me—and still is——

(Towards the end of the conversation NEWT. and RAYMOND are peeking in at the door, trying to listen, and evidently enjoying the fun. Suddenly in the midst of JIM's speech, RAYMOND pushes NEWT. into the room and he sprawls on the floor. JIM makes a dash after him and follows him off the stage. A moment later the COLONEL enters, and looks knowingly at JENNIE as he speaks.)

COL. W. Well, Jennie, did you give Jim a good talking to about his wild methods of teaching? Did you line him up?

JENNIE. *(Starting and looking uncomfortable on her way towards the door)* I—I—I—I'm afraid I didn't, Father.

COL. W. Ha! Ha! These Brown Mice are the devil and all to control!

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE I

(Schoolroom, as described in Stage Directions, page

6. NEWT. BRONSON and RAYMOND SIMMS—
sweeping and dusting school.)

NEWT. I wouldn't go back on a friend the way you're going back on me.

RAYMOND. You got no call to talk that way. How'm I goin' back on you?

NEWT. We was goin' to trap all winter, and next winter we were goin' up in the north woods together.

RAYMOND. You know that we cain't run any trap line and keep on at school.

(NEWT. looks glum; makes no reply.)

RAYMOND. Mr. Irwin needs all the he'p every kid in this settlement kin give him. He's the best friend I ever had. He teaches me how to do things that will make me something.

NEWT. Darn it all!

RAYMOND. You know that you'd think maghty small of me if I'd desert the teacher now.

NEWT. Well, then! What'll we do when the trustees get the superintendent to take away his certificate and make him quit teachin', hey?

RAYMOND. Nobody'll eveh do that. I'd set in the schoolhouse do' with my rifle and shoot anybody that'd come to th'ow Mr. Jim outen the school.

NEWT. Not in this country. This ain't a gun country.

RAYMOND. But it orto be either a justice kentry or a gun kentry. It stands to reason it must be one or the otheh, Newton.

NEWT. No, it don't, either.

RAYMOND. Why should they th'ow Mr. Irwin outen the school? Ain't he teachin' us right?

NEWT. I told you before how my father, and Con. Bonner, and Haak Peterson didn't mean to hire Jim Irwin at all. They each voted for him so's he'd have *one* vote! They were all against him from the first, but they didn't know how to get rid of him. But now he's done so many things that a teacher ain't supposed to do, and he ain't done what a teacher *is* supposed to do,—so they have made up their minds to ask him to resign. If he don't resign, they will turn him out some way or other. They think they'll get the superintendent to have his certificate taken away.

RAYMOND. What wrong's he done? I don't know what teachers air supposed to do in this kentry, but Mr. Jim seems to be the only sure-enough teacher I ever had!

NEWT. He don't teach out of the books the school board adopted.

RAYMOND. But he makes up better lessons. An' all the things we do in school he'ps us one way or another.

NEWT. He begins at eight in the mornin' an' he has some of us there till half-past five, and comes back in the evening. And every Saturday some of the kids are doin' something at the schoolhouse.

RAYMOND. They don't pay him for overtime, do

they? Well, then, they orto instid of turnin' him out!

NEWT. Well, they'll turn him out! I'm havin' more fun in school than I ever had, an' that's why I'm with you on this quittin' trapping—but they'll get Jim, all right.

RAYMOND. I'm having something betteh'n fun. My pap has never understood this kentry, an' we-all has had bad times hyeh; but Mr. Jim an' I have studied out how I can make a betteh livin' next year. It seems we didn't do our work right last year, but in a couple of years we'll get on our feet.

(JIM enters. He has various sorts of dishes containing specimens of grain and grass seeds.)

JIM. Newton, make out percentage problems for Class B, in arithmetic, for to-morrow. Make them plain, and be sure that you name the farm every time. Here's the records of the seeds we examined yesterday.

(Few moments of activity.)

JIM. (To NEWT.) It's ten minutes to five. Have you the problems ready?

(Knock at door. NEWT. goes to door. Enter MRS. PETERSON, MRS. BONNER, MRS. BRONSON. JIM shakes hands with them and gives them chairs.)

MRS. BONNER. We'd like to speak to you, teacher, without the children here.

(JIM dismisses boys.)

MRS. BONNER. You may think it strange of us coming at such an hour.

JIM. I wish more of the parents would call—at any hour of the day.

MRS. BONNER. Or night either, I dare say. I hear you've the scholars here at all hours, Jim. (JIM smiles)

JIM. We do break the union rules, I guess, Mrs. Bonner. There seems to be more to do than we can get done during school hours.

MRS. BONNER. What right have ye to be burning the district's fuel, and wearing out the school's property out of hours like that?—Not that it's any of my business. I just thought of it, that's all. What we came for, Mr. Irwin, is to object to the way the teachin's being done—corn and wheat, and hogs and the like, instead of the learnin' schools was made to teach.

JIM. Schools were made to prepare children for life, weren't they, Mrs. Bonner?

MRS. BONNER. To be sure. I can see, an' the whole district can see, that it's easier for a man that's been a farmhand to teach farmhand knowledge than the learnin' schools was set up to teach, but if so be he hasn't the book education to do the right thing, we think he should get out and give a real teacher a chance.

JIM. What am I neglecting?

(MRS. BONNER seems unprepared for the question, and sits for an instant mute. MRS. PETERSON interposes her attack while MRS. BONNER is recovering her wind.)

MRS. PETERSON. (In a precise way which seems to show that she knows exactly what she wants) We people that have had a hard time want to give our boys and girls a chance to live easier lives than

we lived. We don't want our children taught about nothing but work. We want higher things.

JIM. Mrs. Peterson, we must have first things first. Making a living is the first thing.

MRS. PETERSON. Haakon and I will look after making a living for our family. We want our children to learn nice things, and go to high school, and after a while to the juniversity.

JIM. And I will send out from this school, if you will let me, pupils better prepared for higher schools than have ever gone from it—because they will be trained to think in terms of action. They will go knowing that thoughts must always be linked with things. Aren't your children happy in school, Mrs. Peterson?

MRS. PETERSON. I don't send them to school to be happy, Yim. I send them to learn to be higher people than their father and mother.

JIM. They'll be higher people—higher than their parents—higher than their teacher. They'll be efficient farmers, and efficient farmers' wives. They'll be happy, because they will know how to use as much brains in farming as any lawyer or doctor or merchant can possibly use in his business. I'm educating them to find an outlet for genius in farming.

MRS. BONNER. It's a fine thing to work hard for a lifetime, an' raise nothing but a family of farmers! A fine thing!

JIM. They will be farmers anyhow, in spite of your efforts—ninety out of every hundred of them! And of the other ten, nine will be wage-earners in the cities, and wish to God they were back on the farm; and the hundredth one will succeed in the city. Shall we educate the ninety and nine to fail, that the hundredth, instead of enriching the rural life with his talents, may steal them away to make the city stronger? It is already too strong for us farm-

ers. Shall we drive our best away to make it stronger?

(MRS. BONNER and MRS. PETERSON, silenced for a moment, and MRS. BRONSON, who has been gazing about at the typewriter, the hectograph, the exhibits of weed seeds, the Babcock milk-tester, and the other unscholastic equipment, points to the lists of words and the arithmetic problems on the board.)

MRS. BRONSON. Did you get them words from the speller?

JIM. No, we got them from a lesson on seed wheat.

MRS. BRONSON. Did them examples come out of an arithmetic book?

JIM. No, we used problems we made ourselves. We are figuring profits and losses on your cows, Mrs. Bronson.

MRS. BRONSON. Ezra Bronson don't need any help in telling what's a good cow. He was farming before you was born.

NEWT. (*Sticking his head in the door*) Like fun, he don't need help! He's going to dry old Cherry off and fatten her for beef; and he can make more money off the cream by beefing about three more of 'em. The Babcock test shows they're just boarding on us without paying their board!

(*Women become ruffled.*)

MRS. BRONSON. Newton, don't interrupt me when I'm talking to the teacher!

NEWT. Well, then, don't tell the teacher that pa knows which cows were good and which were poor. If any one in this district wants to know about their

cows, it'll pay them to step around to this joint. They'll have to come, too, if they're going to make anything selling cream. Wait until we get out our reports on the herds, Ma!

MRS. PETERSON. Cows! If we leave you in this yob, Mr. Irwin, our children will know nothing but cows and hens, and soils and grains—and where will the culture come in? How will our boys and girls appear when we get fixed so we can move to town? We won't have no culture at all, Yim!

JIM. Culture! Why—why, after ten years of the sort of school I would give you if I were a better teacher, and could have my way, the people of the cities would be begging to have their children admitted so that they might obtain real culture—culture fitting them for life in the twentieth century.

MRS. BONNER. Don't bother to get ready for the city children, Jim. You won't be teaching the Woodruff school that long.

(The women have moved toward door during MRS. BONNER'S last speech, and they go out as she finishes. JIM turns grimly to blackboard and begins writing exercises.)

(Knock at door. Enter JENNIE.)

JENNIE. How do you do, Mr. Irwin? I knew I'd find you here long after school was dismissed. Whatever do you do here every night until six o'clock?

JIM. Let me give you a chair?

JENNIE. Oh, no, thank you. I'll just make myself at home. I know my way about in this school-house, you know. Just you go on with your work. *(JENNIE goes about the room, examining equipment)*

JENNIE. What are all these cards about, Jim?

JIM. Oh, we've been taking a cow census of the neighborhood.

JENNIE. A cow census? Well, what next? What is the idea?

JIM. Well, we've found that there are 138 cows in the district, and over 600 within an hour's drive. To-morrow, in the language class, Class Four is to tell in three hundred words or less, whether there are enough cows in the neighborhood to justify a co-operative creamery, and give the reason. They are to read articles in the farm papers on the subject. I've just been making up some arithmetic problems from prices given in the correspondence we have had with creameries.

JENNIE. Jim, do you know that you are facing trouble?

JIM. Trouble is the natural condition of a man in my state of mind. But it is going to be a delicious sort of tribulation.

JENNIE. I don't know what you mean.

JIM. Then I don't know what you mean.

JENNIE. (*Pleadingly*) Jim, I want you to give up this sort of teaching. Can't you see it's all wrong?

JIM. No, I can't see that it's wrong. It's the only sort I can do. What do you see wrong in it?

JENNIE. Oh! I can see some very wonderful things in it, but it can't be done in this district. It may be correct in theory, but it won't work in practice.

JIM. Jennie, when a thing won't work, it isn't correct in theory.

JENNIE. Well, then, Jim, why do you keep on with it?

JIM. It works. Anything that's correct in theory will work. If the theory seems correct, and yet won't work, it's because something is wrong in an unsuspected way with the theory. But my theory is correct, and it works,

JENNIE. But the district is against it.

JIM. Who are the district?

JENNIE. The school board are against it.

JIM. The school board elected me after listening to an explanation of my theories as to the new sort of rural school in which I believe. I assume that they commissioned me to carry out my ideas.

JENNIE. Oh, Jim! That's sophistry! They all voted for you so you wouldn't be without support. Each wanted you to have *just one* vote. Nobody wanted you elected. They were all surprised. You know that!

JIM. They stood by and saw the contract signed, and—yes, Jennie, I *am* dealing in sophistry. I got the school by a sort of shell-game, which the board worked on themselves. But that doesn't prove that the district is against me. I believe the people are for me now, Jennie. I really do!

JENNIE. (*Very decidedly*) They are going to petition me, as Superintendent, and ask to have you removed on the ground that you are incompetent.

JIM. Has it come to that? Well, to tell the truth, I have rather expected it.

JENNIE. (*Coldly and stiffly*) Well, if you won't change your methods, I suggest that you resign.

JIM. Do you think that changing my methods would appease the men who feel that they are made laughing-stocks by having engaged me? They would never call off their dogs.

JENNIE. But your methods would make a great difference with my decision.

JIM. And do you think that my abandonment of the things in which I believe, because of this attack, would prove that I am competent? Or would it show me incompetent?

(JENNIE silent.)

JIM. I guess that we'll have to stand or fall on things as they are.

JENNIE. You refuse to resign?

JIM. Sometimes I think it's not worth while to try any longer. And yet, I believe that in my way I'm working on the question which must be solved if the nation is to stand—the question of making the farm and farm life what they should be and may well be. At this moment I feel like surrendering because *you* want me to—but I'll have to think about it. Suppose I refuse to resign?

JENNIE. (*Drawing on her gloves*) Unless you resign by the twenty-fifth, they will send in the petition. The charge will be incompetency. I bid you good-evening.

(JENNIE goes out angrily. JIM sits down at desk dejectedly, head in hands. After a few moments he straightens up and begins to write, his lips set firmly. Tap at the door. Enter COL. WOODRUFF, in hat and ulster, whip in hand.)

COL. W. Hello, Jim!

JIM. How do you do, Colonel? Take a chair, won't you? I've just written my resignation.

COL. W. Resignation! Nonsense! I came to see if you and the boys at the schoolhouse can tell me anything about the smut in my wheat. I heard you were going to work on that to-night.

JIM. I had forgotten——

COL. W. I'll come to-night, if you like. I'll give the boys a chance to test the value of the formalin treatment on my seed.

JIM. Thank you, Colonel. (*Pause*)

COL. W. Jim, can your school kids spell?

JIM. I think that they can outspell any school about here.

COL. W. Good! How are they about reading aloud?

JIM. Better than they were when I took hold.

COL. W. How about arithmetic and other branches? Have you sort of kept them up to the course of study?

JIM. I have carried them in a course parallel to the textbooks, and covering the same ground. But it has been vocational work, you know—related to life.

COL. W. Well, if I were you, I'd put them over a rapid review of the textbooks for a few days—say between now and the twenty-fifth.

JIM. Why?

COL. W. Well, I wouldn't be surprised if the trustees ask Jennie, as Superintendent, to come and look you over and examine the school soon. And say, Jim, just let me put that resignation of yours in the waste-basket. (*Reaches over to the desk and picks up the sheet of paper and crumples it in his hand*) Jim, I think I'll give myself the luxury of being a wild-eyed reformer for once.

JIM. Yes?

COL. W. And if you think, Jim, that you've got no friends, just remember that I'm for you.

JIM. Thank you, Colonel.

COL. W. And we'll show them they're in a horse-race. (*Cracks whip*)

JIM. I don't see——

COL. W. You're not supposed to see, but you can bet that we'll be with them at the finish; and by thunder! (*Cracks whip*) while they're getting a full meal, we'll get at least a lunch. See?

JIM. But Jennie says——

COL. W. (*With growing excitement*) Don't tell me what she says. She's acting according to her judgment—but she's only a woman! But you go on

and review the common branches, and keep your nerve. I haven't felt so much like a scrap since the day we stormed Lookout Mountain! I kinder like being a wild-eyed reformer, Jim! Come on and I'll give you a ride home now.

Curtain

SCENE II

School room as in Scene I. (JENNIE seated at the desk. JIM, MR. and MRS. BONNER, MR. and MRS. PETERSON, MR. and MRS. BRONSON, and as many spectators as convenient, present.)

JENNIE. (*Rises*) This is no formal proceeding and we shall dispense with red tape. I have here (holds paper in hand) a petition for the removal of Mr. Irwin as teacher of this school, on the ground of incompetency. I have this morning examined the pupils of this school, and now I should like to hear why Mr. Bonner, Mr. Peterson, and Mr. Bronson think that Mr. Irwin is not competent.

MR. BONNER. (*Rises eagerly*) This teacher don't pay any attention at all to the school books. He makes up quistions of his own instead of givin' them youngsters quistions out of the arithmetic. How can they do sums when they haven't the answers in the back of the book to look at? Then he gives them shpellings that ain't in the shpeller an' they hardly iver open their shpelling books at all!

MR. PETERSON. (*Jumps up, gesticulating*) And he burns the fuel in Yanuary dat ve bought for all vinter havin' fires more dan ve jused to. Yumpin' yiminy! And de school furniture all vears out! Yust new-fangled bunk, I tank!

MR. BRONSON. (*Rising and speaking emphatically*) He teaches the children to test our cows for butterfat,

which isn't his business. They are spending their time on weeds and seeds and carpentering and sewing when they should be learnin' to parse and say off the rivers and bays in all the continents and all such things.

MRS. PETERSON. (*From her seat*) We don't want our children brought up to be yust farmers. What will they do when we move to town?

MR. BRONSON. (*Has remained standing during MRS. P.'s speech*) And it ain't enough for him to carry on the way he does, but I've heard tell that he wants to have a blacksmith shop on the school grounds, and a co-operative creamery nearby, an' a building to have movin' pictures in an' concerts and all such nonsense, and——

MR. BONNER. (*Interrupting excitedly*) An' worse than that, he said wan day he'd like to have a room at the school where the wimmin could leave their babies whin they go to town, and have somebody here to tache the girls how to take care of babies! An' I say that we can rest our case right there. If that ain't the limit, I don't know what is!

JENNIE. Well, do you desire to rest your case right there? (*No reply*) Then, Mr. Irwin, will you tell us, please, what you have done in the way of teaching the things called for by the course of study, while you have been following out these very interesting and original methods?

JIM. What is the course of study? Is it anything more than an outline of the mental march the pupils are ordered to make? Take reading: Does it give the child any greater mastery of the printed page to read about Casabianca on the Burning Deck than to read about the codling moth which makes the apple wormy? And how can he be given better command of language than by writing about things that he sees round about him every day on the farm? Everything they do runs into numbers, and we do more arithmetic

than the course requires. There isn't any branch of study—not even poetry and art and music—that isn't touched by life. If there is we haven't time for it in the common schools.

JENNIE. Then you mean to assert that while you have been doing this work, which was not contemplated by those who made up the courses of study, you have not neglected anything?

JIM. I mean that I'm willing to stand or fall by the examination which you made to-day of these children in the very textbooks I am accused of neglecting. At your request I was absent when you examined the children. I know nothing of how they did. But I'm willing to stand or fall by the results of your examination.

JENNIE. (*Turning towards trustees, speaking very deliberately*) Gentlemen, I must inform you that I found the pupils of this school in no respect behind those of other schools in the mastery of the prescribed course of study. Not only that, but they showed unmistakably their ability to do the work the textbooks are supposed to fit them for, and I only wish the average school could do as well under a similar test. (*Applause from some spectators*) I therefore can see no reason to comply with your petition for the removal of this teacher. Have you anything further to say?

MR. BONNER. (*Rising and shaking fist*) Your examinations tind to show that in orrder to larn anything you shud shtudy somethin' else! (*Stalks out angrily, but turns when near the door*) We're licked—but—we'll git this guy yit!

(*MRS. BONNER is one of the first to flounce out of the room, head held high and lips firmly set. The others follow until only the COLONEL and JIM remain.*)

COL. W. Jim, the next heat is the school board election. We must get the right trustees put on next year.

JIM. Is that a possibility? Aren't we sure to be defeated at last? Shouldn't I quit at the end of my contract? All I ever hoped for was to be allowed to finish that. And is it worth the trouble?

COL. W. As for being worth while—why, this thing is too big to drop. Look here, Jim. Your school fair comes on next week, doesn't it? Well, go ahead. Make it a good one. It will give you a chance to show the folks what you're teaching their youngsters besides readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic. I'm just beginning to understand what you're driving at.—And I like being a wild-eyed reformer more and more.

Curtain

SCENE III

Schoolroom as before, but with poster lettered "Welcome to Woodruff School Fair" prominently placed. Women's wraps strewn over school desks. Baskets here and there, and everything to indicate that a school fair is in progress on the school grounds.

Curtain rises on JENNIE, in the act of pinning on hat and making ready for the drive home.

(Enter COL. W. with PROFESSOR WITHERS of Ames Agricultural College, who carries a traveling bag.)

COL. W. Jennie, this is Professor Withers of Ames Agricultural College. Professor Withers, my daughter. (JENNIE and PROF. W. exchange the usual salutations)

COL. W. I'll be back in a few moments, Jennie. *(Goes out)*

JENNIE. What do you think of our school fair, Prof. Withers?

PROF. W. The exhibition of this rural school is the best I ever saw. That's a clever man, that Irwin. It delighted me to see that class of children testing and weighing milk, judging grain and livestock. I hear Irwin has been having some trouble with his school board.

JENNIE. Yes, he has.

PROF. W. Wasn't there an effort made to remove him from his position?

JENNIE. Proceedings before me to revoke his certificate.

PROF. W. On what grounds?

JENNIE. Incompetency. But I found that his pupils were really doing very well in the regular course of study which he seems to be neglecting.

PROF. W. I'm glad he came out so well.

JENNIE. Yes, but what do you really think of his notions?

PROF. W. Very advanced. Indeed, he's wonderful! He surprises me. I have invited him to make an address at Ames during Farmers' Week.

JENNIE. (*Showing astonishment*) He?

PROF. W. Yes, Miss Woodruff. Mr. Irwin has something that we need. Just how far he will go, just what he will amount to, it is impossible to say. But something must be done for the rural schools, something along the lines he is following. He is worth encouraging. You won't make any mistake if you make the most of Mr. Irwin.—Well, I must get along if I am to catch that train. (*They walk toward the door together*) Good-bye, Miss Woodruff. Hope you will come, too, and hear Mr. Irwin, Farmers' Week. I am sure he will make a hit. (*They pass off the stage together*)

(*Enter MRS. BONNER and MRS. BRONSON in search of their wraps and baskets.*)

MRS. BONNER. (*Helping MRS. BRONSON on with her coat*) I don't see what there is in all this to set people talking. Buttonholes! Cookies! Humph!

MRS. BRONSON. Well, then, I don't see anything to laugh at when the young girls do the best they can to make themselves capable housekeepers. I'd like to see them taught how to keep house.

MRS. BONNER. And quite right, too, in the proper place and at the proper time. (*They move up to front of stage and speak clearly and distinctly while putting on gloves, etc.*)

MRS. BRONSON. Of course.

MRS. BONNER. At home, now, and by their mothers.

MRS. BRONSON. But take them Simms girls, now. They have to have help outside their home if they are ever going to be like other folks.

MRS. BONNER. Yes, and a lot more help than a farmhand can give 'em in school. Pretty poor trash, they, and I shouldn't wonder if there was a lot we don't know about why they come here.

MRS. BRONSON. As far as that goes, I don't know as it's any of my business so long as they behave themselves.

MRS. BONNER. Isn't it some of your business? I wonder now! By the way Newtie keeps his eye on that Simms girl, I shouldn't wonder if it might turn out your business.

MRS. BRONSON. Pshaw! Puppy love!

MRS. BONNER. You can't tell how far it'll go. I tell you these schools are getting to be nothing more than sparkin' bees, from the teacher down.

MRS. BRONSON. That may be, but I don't see sparkin' in everything boys and girls do as quick as some.

MRS. BONNER. I wonder if Colonel Woodruff would be as friendly to Jim Irwin if he knew that everybody says Jennie did all she could to help Jim because she wants him to get along in the world, so he can marry her?

MRS. BRONSON. I don't know as she is so very friendly to him. Howsomever, Jim and Jennie are both of age, you know.

MRS. BONNER. Yes, but how about our school's bein' ruined by a love affair? Ain't that your business and mine?

MRS. BRONSON. (*Turning away*) Well, Ezra will have the team hitched by now. I mustn't keep him waiting. (MRS. BRONSON *passes off stage at side opposite from that by which she entered*. MRS. BONNER *picks up basket or bag and follows at once, looking disgruntled*)

(*Enter BONNER, followed at once by BRONSON.*)

MR. BRONSON. Looking for your missus, Con?

MR. BONNER. Yes—but I wanted to see you, too.

(*Enter MR. PETERSON.*)

MR. PETERSON. Haf you seen my voman in here?

MR. BONNER. No, Haak—but wait a minute. I want to talk to you fellows. I'm a Republican and you fellers are Democrats, and we've fought each other about who we was to hire fer teacher. But my term on the board is out this year—and when it comes to electing my successor, I think we shouldn't divide on party lines.

MR. PETERSON. The fight about the teacher is a t'ing of the past. All our candidates got odder yobs now.

BRONSON. Yes, Prue Foster wouldn't take the school now if she could get it.

BONNER. But, as I was sayin', I want to git this guy, Jim Irwin. An' bein' the cause of his gittin' the school, I'd like to be on the board to kick him off; but if you fellers would like to have some one else, I won't run, and if the right feller is named, I'll line up what friends I got for him.

PETERSON. You got no friend can git as many wotes as you can. I tink you better run.

BONNER. What say, Ez?

BRONSON. Suits me all right. I guess we three have had our fight out and understand each other.

BONNER. All right, I'll take the office again. Let's not start too soon, but say we begin to line up our friends, to go to the school election and vote kind of unanimous-like?

BRONSON. Suits me.

PETERSON. Very well.

BONNER. I don't like the way Col. Woodruff acts. He rounded up that hearing before the superintendent that shot us all to pieces, didn't he?

PETERSON. I tank not.

BRONSON. Too small a matter for the Colonel to monkey with. I reckon he was just interested in Jim's dilemmer. Or he might have thought the decision was right. Some people do, you know.

BONNER. Right! In a pig's wrist! I tell you, that decision was crooked.

PETERSON. Vell, talk of crookedness wit' Col. Woodruff don't get very fur wit' me.

BONNER. Oh, I don't mean anything bad, Haakon, but it wasn't an all-right decision. (*Walks toward door*) Well, anyway, we'll stick together, and if I git on again we'll get rid of Jim Irwin, all right. (*The three go out together as if to continue conversation*)

(*Enter JIM. Walks up and down, looking thoughtful.*)

COL. W. (*Speaking side stage, as if through open door*) Hey, Jim—are you there?

JIM. Here, Colonel! (*Enter COL. W. in evident good spirits*)

COL. W. Your school fair's been a grand success, my boy. And Jennie says the Professor from Ames is bound to have you on the program at his college doings!—Good for you, Jim!

JIM. Oh, what's the good? The trustees here don't believe in me yet. Peterson and Bronson seem rather encouraging—but Bonner—why, I met him just now—and he scarcely spoke!

COL. W. I saw him doing some campaigning to-day. He expects to get on the school board again.

JIM. Oh, I suppose so.

COL. W. Well, what shall we do about it?

JIM. If the people want him——

COL. W. The people must have a choice offered to them, or how can you or any man tell what they want? How can they tell themselves? I think that it's up to us to see that the people have a chance to decide. It's really Bonner against Jim Irwin.

JIM. That's rather startling, but I suppose it's true. And much chance Jim Irwin has!

COL. W. I calculate that what you need is a champion.

JIM. To do what?

COL. W. To take that office away from Bonner.

JIM. Who can do that?

COL. W. Well, I'm free to say I don't know that any one can, but I'm willing to try. I think that in about a week I shall pass the word around that I'd like to serve my country on the school board. Who wants to be school trustee? It's a post of no profit, very little honor, and much vexation. And yet there are always men who covet such positions. And generally they are men with no interest in education and no fondness for it. I think I'll try for it, Jim.

JIM. Even then they'd be two to one, Colonel.

COL. W. Maybe, and maybe not. That would have to be figured on. A cracked log splits easy.

JIM. Anyhow, what's the use? I shan't be disturbed this year—and after that, what's the use?

COL. W. Why, Jim, you aren't getting short of breath, are you? Do I see frost on your boots? I thought you good for the mile, and you aren't turning out a quarter-horse, are you? I don't know what all it is you want to do, but I don't believe you can do it in nine months, can you?

JIM. Not in nine years!

COL. W. Well, then, let's plan for ten years. I ain't going to become a reformer at my time of life as a temporary job. Will you stick if we can swing the thing for you?

JIM. I will!

COL. W. All right. We'll keep quiet and see how many votes we can muster up at the election. How many can you speak for?

(JIM thinks for a few minutes.)

COL. W. How many can you round up?

JIM. I think that I can speak for myself and old man Simms.

(The COLONEL laughs.)

COL. W. Fine politician! Fine politician! Well, Jim, we may get beaten in this, but if we are, let's not have them going away saying they've had no fight. You round up yourself and old man Simms and I'll see what I can do—I'll see what I can do! Come on and climb into my buggy. I've got the team and they're in fine trim. The next heat in the race is the school election. We've got to control that board next year, and we'll do it. I like being a wild-eyed reformer, more and more.

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE I

Sitting-room in Mr. BRONSON's home. (See stage directions, page 6.) Curtain rises on MRS. BRONSON, darning socks, FANNY BRONSON playing with doll. Enter NEWT. looking sick.

NEWT. I feel kind of funny, Mother. I think I'll lie down a while.

MRS. BRONSON. All right, son. Stretch out on the lounge there.

(Enter Mr. BRONSON and stands at side of stage, shaving-mug and brush in hand.)

BRONSON. Fanny, tell Henry to get the horse out. I'm going to the schoolhouse to the election. *(Withdraws quickly. FANNY goes out)*

MRS. BRONSON. *(Throwing down needlework abruptly)* Why, it's half-past three and the school election is at four o'clock! I must help to get your father off in time. *(Goes out)*

NEWT. *(Raises himself up on his elbow, and winks at the audience)* Here's where I put one over on Dad.

(Groans and acts as if in great pain. Enter FANNY)

FANNY. What's the matter, Newtie?

NEWT. Run and tell them brother's dying.

(FANNY *rushes to the door.*)

FANNY. Mother, Dad, Newtie's awful sick! He says he's dying!

(MRS. BRONSON *rushes in, calls ner husband.* NEWT. *groans in convulsions, arms and legs drawn up, muscles tense.*)

MRS. BRONSON. What's the matter? What's the matter, boy?

NEWT. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

MRS. BRONSON. Newtie! Newtie! Where are you in pain? Tell mother, Newtie.

NEWT. Oh, I feel awful!

MR. BRONSON. What you been eating?

NEWT. Nothing. (*Convulses in strong spasms, and groans*)

MR. BRONSON. I saw you eating dinner.

NEWT. That's all I've eaten except a few raisins. I was putting strychnine in 'em for the rats

MRS. BRONSON. Oh, heavens! He's poisoned! Drive for the doctor, Ezra! Drive!

(MR. BRONSON *leaps toward the door, and as he passes out he shouts, "Give him mustard and water!"*)

MRS. BRONSON. Fanny, run over for Mr. and Mrs. Peterson. Tell them to come right away.

(NEWT. *groans and rolls about.* MRS. BRONSON *goes to the kitchen—brings back mustard tin, glass, etc.*) Enter MR. and MRS. PETERSON and FANNY.)

MRS. BRONSON. Just help me get him into the bed-

room, Mr. Peterson. I've got mustard and water. We're afraid he's poisoned.

(MR. PETERSON and MRS. BRONSON support NEWT. and they go off the stage. MRS. PETERSON and FANNY cross the stage hurriedly several times, carrying glasses of water, hot-water bags, basin, etc. MR. PETERSON returns to the sitting-room, looking worried.)

MR. PETERSON. The school election will be over,—but I tank I can't leave that voman alone vith that sick poy.

(MR. PETERSON walks up and down. Looks out of door or window. Lights pipe. Fidgets about.)

MR. PETERSON. I vish that doctor vould come. (Looks at watch.) Vell, it's too late for the school election now.

(Enter NEWT., supported by his mother and MRS. PETERSON.)

MRS. BRONSON. He says he'd rather lie out here now. He's very weak. I wish the doctor would come.

(MRS. BRONSON and MRS. PETERSON fuss about NEWTIE, tucking him up with cushions and comforters. MR. PETERSON paces up and down uneasily. FANNY hovers about excitedly.)

FANNY. There's the doctor! There's the doctor! I hear him.

(Noise outside. Doors opening. Hurried footsteps. Enter the doctor and MR. BRONSON.)

DOCTOR. What's all this? How are you feeling, Newt.? Any pain?

NEWT. I'm all right. Don't let Mother give me any more of that nasty stuff!

DOCTOR. No, but if you don't tell me just what you've been eating, and doing, and pulling off on us, I'll use this! (*Shows huge stomach-pump*)

NEWT. (*Faintly*) What'll you do with that?

DOC. I'll put this down into your hold and unload you—that's what I'll do.

NEWT. Is the election over, Doc? (*Rises to sitting posture*)

DOCTOR. Yes.

NEWT. Who's elected?

DOCTOR. Colonel Woodruff. Vote was 12 to 11.

NEWT. (*Jumps up*)` Hooray! Hooray! The Colonel's elected! The Colonel's elected! Well, Dad, I suppose you'll be sore, but the only way I could see to get in half a vote for Col. Woodruff was to get poisoned and send you after the doctor. If you'd gone it would 'a' been a tie, anyhow, and likely you'd 'a' persuaded somebody to change to Bonner. That's what's the matter with me. I killed your vote. Now you can do whatever you like to me—but I'm sorry I scared mother.

(BRONSON *makes as if to seize NEWT., who moves away. Laughter and amusement on the part of the others. BRONSON follows NEWT. up, and takes him by the throat, but not roughly.*)

NEWT. Don't pinch, Dad! I've been using that neck and it's tired!

BRONSON. (*Shaking NEWT.*) Why, you darned infernal little fool! I've a notion to take a hame-strap to you! If one or both of them horses is hurt by the run I gave them, I'll lick you within an inch of

your life! I wouldn't want to drive a good horse to death for any young hoodlum like you! And you scared your mother half to death.

(During this speech MR. and MRS. PETERSON and the Doctor show amusement. FANNY dances about, wide-eyed. The Doctor picks up his hat, and BRONSON, seeing this, turns to him.)

BRONSON. All right, Doc. How much do I owe you? *(They pass off the stage together)*

(NEWT. makes sign to FANNY, and they sneak off together. MR. and MRS. PETERSON talk with MRS. BRONSON.)

PETERSON. Vell, I'm glad the Colonel vas elected.

MRS. BRONSON. So am I. Ez had promised he would vote for Bonner, but I believe he'd rather have the Colonel in. Bonner won't give in, but Ezra and I are beginning to think that Jim's ideas may be all right. I liked that there school fair.

MRS. PETERSON. Yes, and did you hear that Jim is going to Ames next week? That professor that was judgin' is goin' to haf Jim gif a speech before all hands! Vell, vell!

MR. PETERSON. Ve must get home now. The vife left the churning ven Fanny called.

MRS. BRONSON. *(Seeing them to the door)* It was good of you to come. I *was* scared! That young rascal!

Curtain

SCENE II

COLONEL WOODRUFF'S *sitting-room.*

Curtain rises on COLONEL WOODRUFF, occupied in reading or writing. Gets up—stretches arms—walks about—goes to side of stage as if looking out of the window. Looks at watch. Looks out several times during next speech—and walks about impatiently.

COL. W. Seems to me Jennie's had time to be here now, unless that train's very late. I wonder how Jim got along? I'd like to have been there myself. I'm afraid poor old Jim would fall down on it. It's no easy thing to talk to a big crowd at a college convention, but I hope he got his ideas over to them. I wonder what's keeping Jennie, anyway?—Oh, here she is at last!

(Enter JENNIE in traveling attire, with bag.)

COL. W. Hello, Jennie, girl! Tell us all about it.

JENNIE. Well, when Jim began I thought he was going to make a failure of it. He began the speech he had committed to memory, and then he lost his way, and couldn't remember it. He became so confused and tried to find the pages he had written out. He couldn't find the place in the pages, and for a

minute or two I thought he was swamped. I just felt sick! Then he straightened up, stuffed the paper into his pocket, and began to talk just as if he were talking to the people here at home. Everyone paid the closest attention. You could have heard a pin drop! And when he finished there was a great burst of applause. Ever so many people went forward to shake hands with him. We all had dinner together afterwards—Jim and I, and Professor Withers and the Principal of the Normal School. An old man from Waterloo County offered Jim a position to teach their school—a two-roomed school. He wants Jim to be principal. But there's Jim coming up the lane. He'll tell you about it himself. I must go and get some supper.

(JENNIE goes out. Enter JIM. COLONEL shakes hands.)

COLONEL W. Well done, Jim! Congratulations! Good for you! But what's this I've heard, young man?—Some old chap wanting to get you away from us——

JIM. (*Laughing*) Oh! Mr. Hofmeyer. Well, he's made me an offer.

COL. W. What'd he offer? Tell me what he said.

JIM. He came up to me after I had finished speaking and said, "Do you teach the kind of school you lay out in your talk?" I said, "I try to, sir." "Well," said he, "that's the kind of education I believe in. I kep' school back in Pennsylvania, fifty years ago, and I made the scholars measure things and weigh things, and apply their studies as far as I could. I b'lieve your idea of teaching would please our folks. What d'ye say to comin' down and teachin' our school? It's a two-room affair, and I was made a committee of one to find a teacher." He went on and told me they'd give me \$150 a month, and I'd be principal.

COL. W. (*Eagerly and anxiously*) Did you make any deal with him?

JIM. No, I told him I'd think it over. He said he'd write me a formal offer and perhaps offer more salary.

COL. W. I wonder what Bonner and the others will say?

JIM. Oh! The trustees were down at Ames. I met Bonner afterwards. He surprised me.

COL. W. You don't say so? What'd he say?

JIM. He asked me what kind of proposition Mr. Hofmeyer made to me. He said Hofmeyer asked him about me, and that he, Bonner, told him I was a crack-erjack. Just imagine Bonner telling anyone that I was a crackerjack!

COL. W. He said he'd get you yet, Jim!

(JIM laughs. COL. W. rises and walks about excitedly.)

COL. W. Jim, in my capacity of wild-eyed reformer, I've made up my mind that the first four miles of the trip is to make the country teacher's job bigger. It's got to be a man's size, or we can't get real men and women to stay at the work.

JIM. That's a statesman-like way of putting it.

COL. W. Well, don't you turn down the Waterloo County job until we have a chance to see what we can do. I'll get some kind of meeting together, and what I want you to do is to use this offer as a club over this helpless school district. What we need is to be held up! Hold us up, Jim!

JIM. I can't, Colonel.

COL. W. Yes, you can, too! Will you try it?

JIM. I want to treat everybody fairly,—Mr. Hofmeyer included. I don't know what to do, hardly.

COL. W. Well, I'll get the meeting together, and in the meantime, think of what I've said, will you?

JIM. All right. Thank you, Colonel. I must get on now. Mother'll be waiting for me. Good-night.

(COLONEL *sits down as if to write out notices for the meeting.*)

Curtain.

ACT IV

SCENE I

Schoolroom. Curtain rises on meeting in progress. All the characters in the play present. As many additional spectators as possible, to convey the idea of a crowded schoolroom. MR. BRONSON presiding, and standing speaking at rise of the curtain.

MR. BRONSON. All that has been said, so far, shows that us folks has found out that this here school under Jim Irwin is doing more for our youngsters—and for all of us, for that matter—than it ever did before. Now, the question is, can we do anything to meet the offer he has got from Waterloo County? Is there any one that's got anything further to say?

MR. SIMMS. (*Rising, and speaking with great lack of confidence at first*) Ah ain't no speaker, but Ah cain't set here an' be quiet an' go home an' face my ole woman an' my boys an' gyuls withouten sayin' a word fo' the best friend any family evah had, Mr. Jim Irwin. (*Applause*) Ah owe it to him that Ah've got the right to speak in this meetin' at all. Gentlemen, we all owe everything to Mr. Jim Irwin! Maybe Ah'll be thought forward to speak hyah, bein' as Ah ain't no learnin' an' some may think Ah don't pay no taxes; but it will be overlooked, Ah reckon, seein' as how we've took the Blanchard farm, a hunderd an' sixty acres, for five yehs, an' move in a week from Sat'day. We pay taxes in our rent, Ah reckon, an' howsomever that

may be, Ah've come to feel that you all won't think hard of me if Ah speak what we feel so strong about Mr. Jim Irwin.

VOICES. Go on! You've got as good a right as anyone. You're all right, old man!

SIMMS. Ah thank you all kindly. Gentlemen and ladies, when Mr. Jim Irwin found us, we was scandalous pore, an' we was wuss'n pore—we was low-down. (*Cries of "No! No!"*) Yes, we was, becauz what's respectable where we come from is one thing, whar all the folks is pore, but when a man gets in a new place, he's got to lift hissself up to what folks does where he's come to, or he'll fall to the bottom of what there is in that there community—an' maybe he'll make a place fer himse'f lower'n anybody else. Where we come from, we was good people, becuz we done the best we could an' the best any one done; but hyah, we was low-down people becuz we hated the people that had mo' learnin', mo' land, mo' money, an' mo friends than what we had. My little gyuhls wasn't respectable in their clothes. My children was ignerant, an' triflin', but I was the most triflin' of all. Ah'll leave it to Colonel Woodruff if I was good fer a plug of terbacker, or a bakin' of flour, at any sto' in the county. Was I, Colonel? Wasn't I perfectly wuthless and triflin'?

COL. W. I guess you were, Mr. Simms. I guess you were, but——

SIMMS. Thankee. I sho' was! Thankee kindly. An' now, what am I good fer? Cain't I get anything I want at the stores? Cain't I git a little money at the bank, if I got to have it?

COL. W. You're just as good as any man in the district. You don't ask for more than you can pay, and you can get all you ask.

SIMMS. Thankee. What Ah tell you is right, ladies and gentlemen. An' what has made the change in us,

ladies and gentlemen? It's the wuk of Mr. Jim Irwin with my boy Raymond, the best boy any man evah had, and my gyuhl, Calista, an' Buddy an' Jinnie, an' with me an' my ole woman. He showed us how to get a toe-holt into this new kentry. He teached the children what orto be did by a renting farmer. He done lifted us up, an' made people of us. He done showed us that you all is good people an' not what we thought you was. Outen what he learned in school, my boy Raymond an' me made as good crops as we could last summer, an' done right much wuk outside. We got the name of bein' good farmers and good wukkers, an' when Mr. Blanchard moved to town, he said he was glad to give us his fine farm for five yeahs. Now, see what Mr. Jim Irwin has done for us! We are livin' in a house with two chimleys an' a swimmin' tub made outen crock'ryware. We'll be in debt a whole lot—on'y we owe it to Mr. Jim Irwin that we got the credit to go in debt with, an' the courage to go on and git out ag'in! (*Applause*) Ah could afford to pay Mr. Jim Irwin's salary myse'f if Ah could. An' there's enough men hyah to-night that say they've been money-he'ped by his teachin' the school, to make up mo' than his wages. Let's not let Mr. Jim Irwin go, neighbors! Let's not let him go!

(COLONEL WOODRUFF *rises.*)

COL. W. Mr. Irwin is here, ladies and gentlemen, and I move that we hear from him as to what we can do to meet the offer of our friends in Waterloo County, who have heard of his good work, and want him to work for them; but before I yield the floor I want to say that this meeting has been worth while just to have been the occasion of our all becoming better acquainted with our friend and neighbor, Mr. Simms. Whatever may have been the lack of understanding,

on our part, of his qualities, they were all cleared up by that speech of his—the best I have ever heard in this neighborhood. *(Applause)* Mr. Chairman, if there is no objection, we will hear from our well-known citizen, whose growing fame is more remarkable for the fact that it has been gained as a country schoolmaster. I need not add that I refer to Mr. James E. Irwin. *(Applause)*

JIM. Friends and neighbors, you ask me to say to you what I want you to do. I want you to do what you want to do—nothing more nor less. Last year I was glad to be tolerated here; and the only change in the situation lies in the fact that I have another place offered me—unless there has been a change in your feelings toward me and my work. I hope there has been; for I know my work is good now, whereas I only hoped it was then.

BONNER. Sure it is! Tell us what you want, Jim!

JIM. What do I want? More than anything else, I want such meetings as this—often—and a place to hold them. If I stay in the Woodruff district, I want this meeting to effect a permanent organization to work with me. You are gathered here to decide what you'll do about the small matter of keeping me at work as your hired man. If I'm to be your hired man, I want a boss in the shape of a civic organization the object of which shall be to put the whole community at school and to boss me in my work for the whole community.

PETERSON. Dat sounds good! We'll do that!

JIM. Then I want you to work out a building scheme for the school. I want you to build as freely for your school, for your children, as for your cattle and horses and hogs. I want some manual training equipment for wood-working and metal-working, with a blacksmith shop and wagon shop, in which the boys may learn to shoe horses and repair tools. I want a place where the girls can learn to cook, keep house, take

care of babies, sew, and learn to be wives and mothers. I want to do work in poultry according to the most modern breeding discoveries, and I want your co-operation in that, and a poultry plant somewhere in the district. I want a small laboratory in which we can work on seeds, pests, sprays, soils, feeds, and the like; for the education of your children must come out of these things. I want some land for actual farming, and a house on it in which your teacher may live. And I want a physician here once in a while to examine the children as to their health, and a dentist to look after their teeth and teach them how to care for them. Also an oculist to examine their eyes. And when Bettina Hansen comes home from the hospital as a trained nurse, I want her to have a job as visiting nurse right here in the Woodruff district. And I want a first-class phonograph with records of the world's best music—and a moving-picture machine—everything to make this school the social centre as well as the educational centre of the countryside. I want all these things, and more. But I don't expect them all at once. I know that this district is too small to do all of these things, and therefore I am going to tell you of another want which will tempt you to think that I am crazy. I want a bigger district—one that will give us the financial strength to carry out the program I have sketched. Let us consolidate several of our small districts into a big one; and the taxes it will require from you will make each of you more money than if invested in farm equipment. This may be a presumptuous thing for me to propose; but the whole situation here to-night is presumptuous on my part, I fear. If you think so, let me go; but if you don't, please keep this meeting together in a permanent organization of grown-up members of the Woodruff School, and by pulling together, you can do these things—all of them, and many more—and you'll make

the Woodruff district a good place to live in and die in—and I shall be proud to live and die in it at your service, as the neighborhood's hired man!

(A long hush. Applause started by JENNIE. Storm of applause.)

Curtain

SCENE II

Schoolroom, just after meeting is over. COLONEL, JENNIE and JIM.

COL. W. Well, Jim, you've carried the day. It's been a great meeting. They can't do all you ask just right away—but they'll do just as you want finally. I am proud that we're to be Consolidated School District Number One. Well, I'll get the horses ready. You'll drive home with us, Jim. (*COLONEL goes out*)

JENNIE. You silly boy! You talked about the good of the school all of the time, and never said a word about your own salary!

JIM. Oh! I forgot all about it! I haven't thought about that at all, Jennie.

JENNIE. Jim, you need a guardian!

JIM. I know it, Jennie. And I know whom I want.

(*JENNIE looks uneasy, etc.*)

JIM. (*Earnestly, taking JENNIE's hands*) Jennie, you told me I must try to be something better than a hired man, but I'm still that, the neighborhood's hired man. But you see, don't you, that it's a man's job, and more than a man's job? I'll have salary enough now to be able to marry. I've loved you since we were children at school. Could you, oh, could you, Jennie—marry me—a hired man—the neighborhood's hired man?

JENNIE. I'm proud of you, Jim, and I'd like to help—and—and—— Yes—I could marry a hired man when the hired man's you!

(Enter the COLONEL. Stands a moment, and stares as JIM holds JENNIE'S hands.)

COL. W. Jennie! Jennie! so you've lined Jim up, have you? Well, don't forget he's a *Brown Mouse*—and these Brown Mice are the very devil to control!

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